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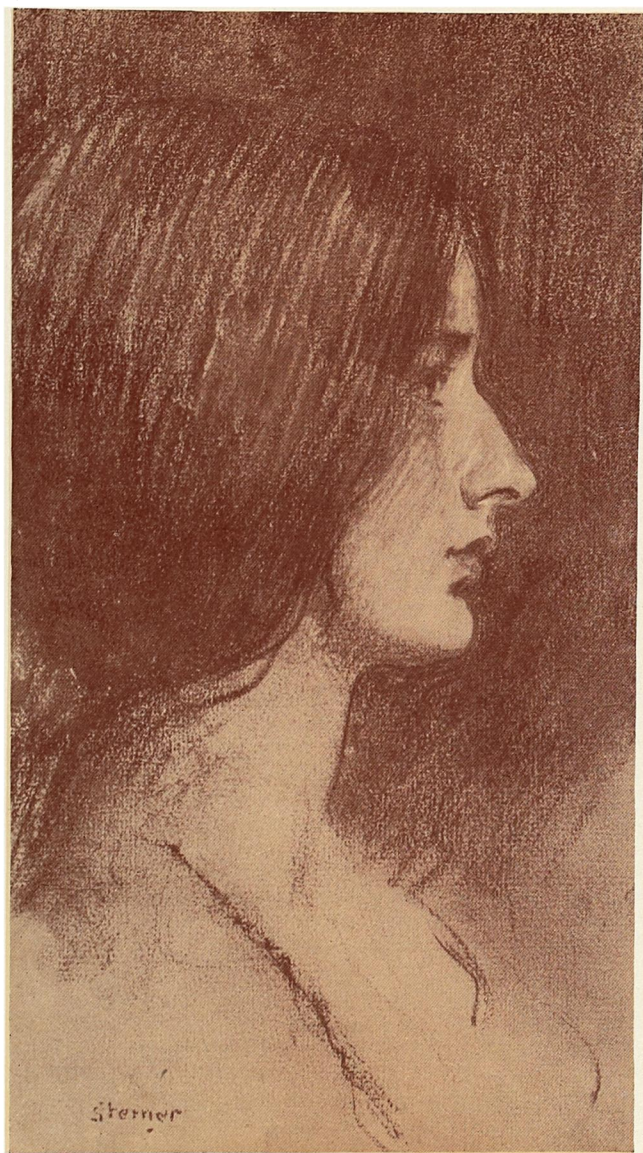
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A PROFILE
BY ALBERT E. STERNER

BRUSH AND PENCIL

VOL. V

FEBRUARY, 1900

No. 5

ALBERT E. STERNER

The average person who turns over the pages of a magazine and glances casually at the pictures that accompany the text pays, I am

afraid, little attention to the underlying qualities that make the illustrations noteworthy. There are few who realize how personal is the work, how much thought and study have been expended thereon, and how far the artist has really succeeded. Yet, in a way, the draughtsman has been a potent factor in attracting the masses to the literary productions that have spread so rapidly in the past half-century and increased the intelligence of the race.

Whether the world is any the happier for this education that, so to speak, has been thrust upon it, is another matter, and one quite foreign to

the subject under consideration. The artist gives to his work just according to his mental endowment, for above and beyond the necessary technical dexterity it is the intellectual side that counts, after all. For some inexplicable reason it has always been said that



A PORTRAIT, BY A. E. STERNER

it is the poet alone who is born, not made. Yet it seems to me the artist even more is thus the unique product of birth; for of all men under the sun he is a natural selection, and while nothing can really prevent his evolution, all the training in the world cannot develop the artistic out of the inartistic.

Mr. Sterner is a cosmopolite, and I think the fact is apparent all through his work. Born in England in 1863, of German parentage, educated in France and Germany, when he came to America as a lad he was as much at home here as anywhere else, and his familiarity with several tongues only gave him a wider literary range and a sympathetic touch with the best of many nations. It was to Chicago that he came in 1881, after a brief course at King Edward's school, in Birmingham, England. He had begun his art studies abroad in a tentative way, but here he continued to draw and paint quite by himself until he became qualified to teach some at the Art Institute. He had all the trials and tribulations that time out of mind have come to the artist; it is probable they helped to broaden his horizon: surely they never for a moment have dulled his enthusiasm. Mr. Sterner toiled unremittingly in those earlier days when Chicago offered even less encouragement for the artist than at present. From the painting of theatrical scenery to the production of menu cards, he tried every legitimate means of making a livelihood, but his success could at no time have been called brilliant; and as New York is the Mecca on this continent to which all artistic roads lead, he finally turned his face in that direction, arriving in the metropolis in 1885, where he cast him about to make connections with the publishers and enter the field of illustration.

It was to the office of *Life*, then in its early stages of a modest prosperity, that he first offered his efforts. A very moderate recompense was given for the initial drawings, though it must be confessed the illustrations themselves did not call for large honorariums. Later, in fear and trembling, he approached the sacred sanctum of the great house of Harper & Brothers, and was thankful to pass his modest contribution behind the awful door that hid the art department from the ribald gaze of young draughtsmen. It was the old story of steady improvement, slow recognition, but certain cementing of his relations with those qualified to pass judgment, and before long Mr. Sterner occupied a worthy position in the world of illustration. Now, with substantial success, came the desire for European travel and a chance at the ateliers of Paris. Presently sufficient funds were put aside to undertake the voyage, and the taste of French art life only whetted the appetite for more. On his return to America, however, he settled down to steady illustration work, and finally came the commission for that which proved to be his greatest success, financially as well as artistically, the drawings for George William Curtis's "Prue and I," which was published by the Harpers in 1891.

Mr. Sterner in this work had accomplished an entirely new departure, giving nearly a hundred pictures, sketches, and jottings of his notion of the tale, and the success was instantaneous. He was once more enabled to return to Paris, and to work seriously in the schools there, where he painted a number of pictures, and received official recognition for his remembered "Bachelor," a lamplight effect of subtle color, quality, and arrangement. Here, too, he drew for the French magazines and illustrated weeklies, and he went to London



A STREET RABBLE. ILLUSTRATION BY A. E. STERNER

for a while, where he contributed to *Black and White*, the *Graphic*, and Beardsley's *Yellow Book*. After all, however, he felt the field for the illustrator to be in America, and thither he again turned his face, returning in 1898. Now he settled down to illustrative work, varied occasionally with water-colors, in which medium he had proved himself to be one of the most accomplished workers, having in 1893 been made a member of the American Water-Color Society. Unfortunately his time has been so fully occupied with the publishers that the water-colors have been only few and far between, and two, or at most three, examples annually have been his output. Some of these, however, have been among the important things in this medium done in

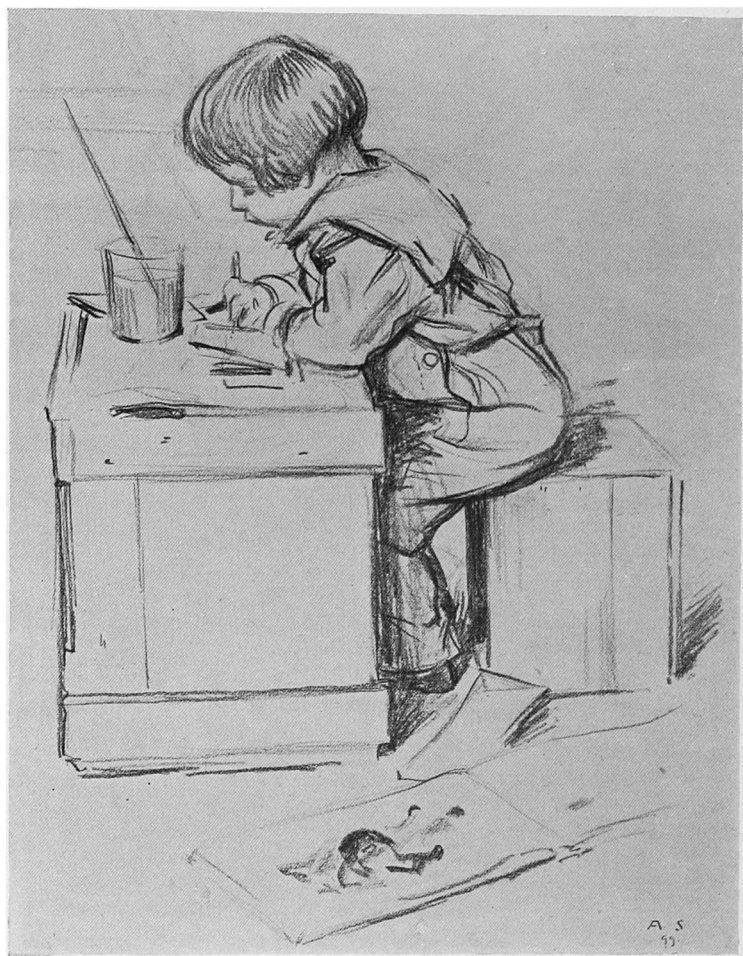
America, his portrait of his wife last year escaping the Evans prize by the narrow margin of one vote.

Nevertheless, it is in the pages of the three great magazines, *Harper's*, the *Century*, and *Scribner's*, that we must look for a record of the art work of Mr. Sterner for these past years, for it is there that he



PORTRAIT STUDY, BY ALBERT E. STERNER

has put the bulk of his serious thought, his strivings, and his artistic experimentings; it is also there that he has best succeeded, perhaps, and laid the foundation for the success he now enjoys. He has been industrious, and he has worked faithfully and seriously, not content merely to fill his commissions, but (and I think the statement is no exaggeration) he has endeavored to make each succeeding drawing an



THE YOUNG ARTIST
BY ALBERT E. STERNER

advance on that which preceded it. In pen and ink, in wash pure and simple, and in the use of crayon, his dexterity is notable, though happily one is never impressed with this cleverness at the expense of the larger qualities of illustration. Primarily, it is the interpretation of the author's characters as seen through the personal temperament of the artist that stands out, for Mr. Sterner, above all, is a man of serious purpose, true to himself and his art. His compositions are intelligently arranged, his lines and masses are soberly considered, and beyond the question of the general effect are the intellectual conception and the subtler qualities such as give distinction.

When it comes to a question of originality, Mr. Sterner is one of a very small band of workers who have held to their own individuality in the handling of the drawing, and have eschewed the alluring technical tricks of other men. You can count these original workers on the fingers of one hand almost, but Mr. Sterner is distinctly one of them. Clever men come up from time to time and flash across the magazine sky with a brilliancy that deludes only the unthinking. They are reminiscent; their ideas and their mannerisms are from unmistakable sources; lured by the surface qualities, they have built upon a foundation that will not stand, and they drop out of sight with even greater rapidity than they came in view. Mr. Sterner, however, has no preconception; with him it is mainly a question of truth, artistic truth, the basis of all genuine art; every new subject is a fresh problem, to be solved according to the needs of the present case, and I think one feels before his work always the serious, genuine effort to get this particular result, the means mattering little so the end is attained.

The successful illustrator, of course, is primarily a good maker of pictures, and by this I mean that he brings to his task a natural feeling for composition—a matter, alas! too frequently neglected by the student, who seems to think once a certain cleverness in catching form and action is attained, the rest will come of itself. While of course some men have a natural aptitude for the arrangement of groups and figures, much may be learned by practice and the careful analysis of the works of the masters, but the principles of composition are as fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians. It is not necessary to follow any absolute rules for special cases, but a knowledge of composition requirements is of great importance, and will keep the artist from making ineffective pictures and ill-advised combinations. The illustrator, however, has little time to work all these out; he must feel the needs and seize quickly the salient points, while the human touch in the illustration is one of the secrets of success. Nor is he limited to costume, epoch, or particular kind of sentiment. He must be grave or gay, poetic or practical, pathetic or humorous, worldly or spiritual, as the case calls for, and he must, even while maintaining his individuality, merge his personality so with that of

the author that his own performance is not accentuated. Truly, all this is a difficult rôle to play, and it must be confessed, at times thankless. That it can be and is done, I make bold to claim is testified by Mr. Sterner's illustrations.

Many of the illustrators who succeed fairly well in giving character sketches fail lamentably when it comes to a question of ladies and gentlemen; and I refer to the intuitive breeding rather than the superficial qualities of sartorial effects. How rarely is it we see a thoroughly high-bred woman in illustration! Of course, not all the draughtsmen are fortunate enough to have models who are born to the better stations of life; this, I claim, however, is of little material moment, for your illustrator with intuition should be able to draw much on his memory or imagination, or on whatever is called that artistic reserve store that makes his work distinguished.

Perhaps the portfolios of the artist are the truest indicators of his ability, for there, among the scraps, the half-finished *croquis*, the intimate efforts he rarely shows save to the chosen few, one can read his inmost soul, his longings, his ambitions and aims; and I confess it gives me more pleasure to pore over these than to see any number of completed pictures. It is from this source mainly that I have seen fit to select the illustrations that accompany this paper, feeling sure they will give a better idea of the man and his methods. The regular illustrations are the property of the world, and he who runs may read; it is here we can study the man at our leisure and formulate a more abiding notion of his talent. I have thought that Mr. Sterner was more successful with his studies of women, for he secures, as few men do, the subtle grace, the delicacy and refinement of the sex; yet there are not wanting those who find in his delineation of child life that sympathy and tenderness that show him in touch with the innocence of infancy. It is, I presume, after all, a matter of personal preferment, and each must judge for himself.

ARTHUR HOEBER.



THE POWER OF LINE IN ILLUSTRATION

To write of the broad and vital scope that book illustration covers in filling the demands of the present day would be a very absorbing task; but to define this many-sided art through the phases it has passed since the days of illuminated manuscript would be truly a limitless one. It must be left to the able recorder to some day give in logical succession the evolution of the artist's craft found on the outside and inside of books and in the illustrated papers which pass in a day. So placing the efforts of many unique personalities, whose seeming inconsistencies have proved the bane of the Philistine,



FROM A DRAWING
BY ALBERT E. STERNER.